

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese

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## *A Reading from a homily of St. Leo the Great*

*died. 461AD  
feast day - 11 April*

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The truths that belong to this day's solemnity are truly well known to you, dearly beloved, and you have frequently been instructed in them; but just as this visible light delights the healthy eye, so to the heart that is healed there comes joy without end from the birth of the Savior; which we must not pass over in silence, though it can never be spoken of in a manner that is worthy of it. For the words of the prophet, *Who shall declare this generation?* [Is. 53:8] refer not alone to that mystery wherein the Son of God is coeternal with the Father, but also to this birth in which the Word was made flesh.

God therefore, the Son of God, equal to, and of the same nature as the Father, and together with the Father the Creator and Lord of all things, present in his Entirety everywhere, and exceeding all things in the order of time, which moves as He has disposed, chose upon this day to be born of the Virgin Mary, for the salvation of the world...

He came down to us, to whom we could not ascend, that we might be brought back from our former bondage and from mundane errors to his eternal blessedness, because though many possessed the love of truth, yet the wavering of unformed minds was beguiled by the craft of deceiving demons; and human ignorance was drawn into diverse and conflicting errors by a learning so-called. To remove this mockery, by which minds made captive served the pride of the evil one, the teaching of the Law was not enough, neither could our nature be healed by the exhortations of the prophets; to these mortal means there had to be joined the truth of the redemption, and our nature, corrupted in its very well-spring, must be born again...

And so, dearly beloved, since such great gifts of the divine Goodness have been, and with such manifest kindness, poured out upon us, the usefulness of the ancient figures has



not alone been our aid, who have been called to an eternal inheritance, but Truth itself, visible and in bodily form, hath appeared; we must therefore celebrate, not with dull, carnal joy, this day of the Lord's Nativity. And this will be worthily and lovingly fulfilled, if each one recalls of whose Body he is a member, and to what Head he is united; so that there may be no deformity within the holy edifice.

**R**eflect then, dearly beloved, and in the light of the Holy Spirit carefully turn your mind to perceive, who it is that has received us into himself, and Whom have we received within us; for since the Lord Jesus Christ by being born has become our flesh, we also, by being reborn, have become His Body.

## *God's Plan for Our Salvation*

*The following is an excerpt from the pastoral letter, "And the Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us", issued by the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) on the occasion of the Third Christian Millennium. The complete document is in our parish library .*

**T**he birth of Jesus Christ and His life here on earth is the most dramatic example of God's love for us. God, in Jesus, reached out to us, even when we were still distant and separated from Him as a result of our own actions (cf. Romans 5:8). He came and preached peace to those who were far off as well as to those who were near (cf. Ephesians 2:17). In the words of St. Athanasius, "He has united in peace those who hated each other...and by His own love endured all things for our salvation." All that God asks in return is that we love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and that we love our neighbor as we would love ourselves (cf. Matthew 22:37-40).

**O**ur God is not remote. He is close and near. He makes Himself accessible to us. Even "though he was in the form of God," our Lord Christ Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Philippians 2:5-8). This self-emptying of God is the mark of His love for us. "When He saw us whom he had created with His own hands perishing, the Creator bowed the heavens and came down to us."

**G**od did this for our salvation and the salvation of the whole world. We could give many different definitions and

interpretations to the word “salvation.” Perhaps St. Athanasius sums it up best: “God became human so that we might become gods...[Jesus] manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father, and He endured shame from us so that we might inherit immortality.” God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, became one of us so that we could become one with God...

God’s taking on of human nature, the Incarnation, is the concrete indication of His desire to be completely approachable “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” - literally, “pitched His tent” among us (John 1:14). God’s desire was to engage us directly on our own level, and to travel with us on our human journey. In the poetry of the Church’s hymns: “the Virgin gives birth to Him who is above beings, and the earth offers a cave to him whom no one can approach.” These are human words trying to describe something that is beyond human comprehension: the person Jesus Christ is actually God with us in the flesh. This is who the early Christians who first encountered Jesus understood Him to be. Believing in Him and experiencing Him in our lives, this is who we understand Him to be.



## *St. Damasus, Pope and Confessor* *Feast Day ~ December 11*

In Washington, we are accustomed to the language and tactics of the world of politics, “political posturing”, and “smear campaigns”. We know that the election of governmental officials can involve fierce rivalry and elections can be both “rigged” and contested. We may not expect that these conditions have ever existed in the Church, but the life of St. Damasus of Rome shows that they have.

The son of a priest attached to the Church of St. Lawrence (the Basilica of *San Lorenzo fuori le Mura*) in Rome, Damasus may have been born, around the year 305, in what is now Portugal where his family originated. St. Constantine became Emperor when Damasus was just a year old, so in his childhood and youth, Christianity was made first legal and then the preferred religion of the Empire. When the Church entered the public arena legally, it began to experience some of the same turmoil that existed in the political realm.

Like his father, Damasus entered the service of the church and served in the same church as his father. He was the archdeacon

when Pope Liberius was exiled by the Emperor Constantius II. Damasus accompanied him, but returned to Rome soon and had a major part in maintaining some stability in the church there during the reign of an “anti-pope”. Pope Liberius was reinstated and upon his death in 366, the 61-year-old Damasus was elected as his successor.



However, the turmoil of earlier years had not completely died down and rival factions of Christians pressed for their favorite candidates for the office of Pope. The deacon Ursinus had a strong following and, despite the fact that Damasus had already been consecrated, managed to convince the Bishop of Tibur to consecrate him as the pope. The outcry of both camps was great and eventually erupted into violence. Clubs and swords were used and it is said that 137 people were killed in the riot.

The Emperor Valentinian had to intervene to restore order (eventually by banning Ursinus and his closest followers to Gaul), but the undercurrent of discontent and revenge was present for the remainder of Pope Damasus’ life. His detractors accused him of murder and adultery (although he never married) and added to this, the friction with those Arians, Appolinarians, and other heretical groups who would have swayed the people of Rome away from Orthodox Christianity, made for a very turbulent pontificate.

But Pope Damasus was not deterred in doing his duty as the Bishop of Rome. One of his far-reaching acts was to appoint Jerome as his personal secretary and to encourage him to make a new, more accurate, translation of the Bible into Latin. St. Jerome’s Vulgate Bible was the primary translation used by the Church in the West for hundreds of years. The second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, which ratified the Nicene Creed, was held during Pope Damasus’ papacy, and he presided over the Council of Rome in 382 which established the canon of Scripture for Rome in agreement with that of North Africa established by St. Augustine.

St. Damasus was devoted to the veneration of the early martyrs of the Church and wanted to keep their memory alive with the Christians of this new age. He worked to maintain and beautify the tombs of the martyrs. He (along with St. Ambrose of Milan) encouraged the appeals of the Christian Senators of Rome in urging the Emperor Gratian to remove the Altar of Victory from the Senate in Rome and to enact other regulations to end the practice of pagan worship. St. Damasus passed to his eternal reward on December 11 in the year 384.

When we stand before God in the great Judgement at the end of time, we will not have to answer for the circumstances of our lives, but for how we lived in those circumstances

and whether we followed Christ faithfully. St. Damasus will surely then be placed with the sheep at Christ's right hand. In the midst of political rivalry and sectarian violence, he was a faithful shepherd of his flock; he rose above the turmoil and led his people in the way of Truth.

**M**ay those of us who live in the midst of political rivalries and turmoil remember that living our lives as faithful Christians is more important than any political party, platform, or office. *Holy Damasus, pray for us.*

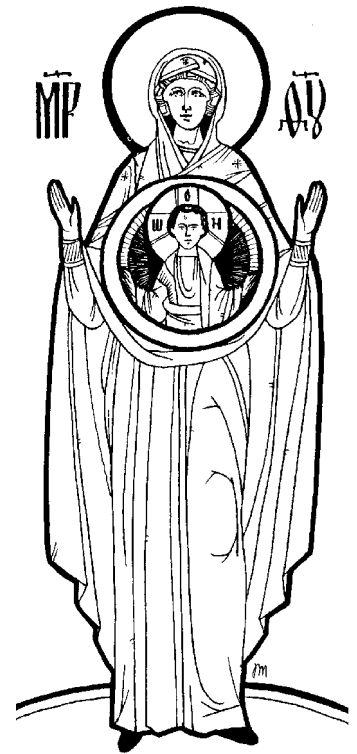
## Parish News

**W**hen Fr. Raphael Garcia was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on November 20, many in the parish were able to attend the beautiful service at St. Andrew's mission in Lewes, Delaware. Fr. Raphael celebrated his first Mass as an Orthodox priest at St. Gregory's on the Feast of the Presentation (Entrance) of the Theotokos in the Temple, November 21. We rejoice with him and Presbytera Catherine as he begins this new phase of his service in the Church.

**C**ollection of food for our Archdiocese's annual Food for the Hungry program will take place during the months of December and January. Please bring canned and packaged dried food and place them in the bin at the stairs near the church narthex. Collected food will be given to Martha's Table or another local program which provides meals for the poor of the city.

**O**ur Advent preparations for the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord continue for most of the month of December. Part of those preparations will include our service of Advent Lessons and Carols on Saturday, December 17, at 6PM. As we hear the Biblical stories of the anticipation of the Messiah and sing the hymns which express that anticipation, may we be made ready for celebrating His coming in Bethlehem at the first Christmas, in our hearts today, and at His second coming at the end of time.

**O**n Christmas Eve, Fr. Nicholas and Fr. Raphael will hear confessions beginning at 8:30PM. We will have a time for singing of carols at 9:30 and the first Mass of Christmas will begin at 10:00. Since Christmas falls on Sunday this year, we will celebrate the third Mass of Christmas (omitting the one which should be held at dawn!) at 10AM on December 25.



We pray for God's blessings on the new bishops of our Archdiocese who will be consecrated on Sunday, December 11, at the Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand in Lebanon. Bishop JOHN (Abdulah) will be the new auxiliary bishop for Worcester and New England; Bishop ANTHONY (Michaels) will serve the Diocese of Toledo; and Bishop NICHOLAS (Ozone) will serve in Brooklyn and assist Metropolitan PHILIP at the Archdiocesan headquarters in Englewood, New Jersey.

## *On the Second Coming of Christ*

*by St. Nikolai of Ochrid*

*When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of his glory [Matt. 25:31]*



The Lord speaks thus, immediately before His most terrible humiliations; before His being bound, spat upon, buffeted, mocked and crucified. In the darkest hour He speaks of His greatest and most glorious hour. Before His terrible and wretched going forth from this world, He speaks of His coming again in His glory. He came the first time from the cave at Bethlehem, humble and unseen; and He will come again on the clouds of His angels. He came the first time like a nobody on the earth; the second time He will reveal Himself from heaven. The first time He stood and knelt on the earth; the second time He will sit on the throne of His glory.

When He comes again in His glory, He will not be unseen by anyone. No-one will ask, like the Magi at his first coming: "Where is the King?", for all will this time see the King and know Him as King. But this seeing and knowing will be joy for some and fear and terror for others. Imagine the joy of those who have fulfilled His commandments, who have prayed and done good works in His name, and especially those who have suffered for His name. And imagine the fear and terror of those who spat on Him and buffeted Him and crucified Him in Jerusalem, as also those through the ages who have derided His miracles, mocked His name and broken His commandments.

Omerciful Lord, forgive us all, who call upon Thy name and sin in our weakness. Forgive us before the tremendous hour of judgement, when Thou shalt be revealed in Thy glory with all Thy holy angels. To thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2011</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>				<b>1</b> St. Eligius of Tournai, BC, 660	<b>2</b> St. Peter Chrysologus, BCD, c. 450	<b>3</b> St. Bibiana of Rome, VM, 363  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>4</b> Second Sunday of Advent; St. Barbara, VM, c. 306; St. Clement of Alexandria, CD, c. 210 <i>V</i>	<b>5</b> St. Sabbas of Palestine, Ab, 532	<b>6</b> St. Nicholas of Myra, BC, c. 342	<b>7</b> St. Ambrose of Milan, BCD, 397  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> <i>W</i>	<b>8</b> Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary	<b>9</b> of the Octave of the Conception	<b>10</b> of the Octave of the Conception; St. Melchiades, PM, 314  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>11</b> Third Sunday of Advent; St. Damasus, PC, 384; of the Octave of the Conception <i>V</i>	<b>12</b> of the Octave of the Conception; St. Spiridon, BC, 348	<b>13</b> St. Lucy, VM, 304; St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837; of the Octave of the Conception	<b>14</b> Ember Wednesday; of the Octave of the Conception	<b>15</b> Octave Day of the Conception; St. Maurus, Ab, 6th c.	<b>16</b> Ember Friday; St. Eusebius of Vercelli, BM, 371  <i>O Sapientia</i>	<b>17</b> Ember Saturday; St. Lazarus of Bethany, BC, 1st c <i>O Adonny Lessons &amp; Carols at 6pm</i>
<b>18</b> Fourth Sunday of Advent  <i>O Radix Jesse</i> <i>V</i>	<b>19</b>  <i>O Clavis David</i>	<b>20</b> St. John of Kronstadt, C, 1908  <i>O Oriens</i>	<b>21</b> St. Thomas, Apostle, 1st c.  <i>O Rex gentium</i>	<b>22</b>  <i>O Emmanuel</i>	<b>23</b>  <i>O Virgo virginum</i>	<b>24</b> Vigil of the Nativity  <i>Mass at 10pm</i> <i>W</i>
<b>25</b> The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; St. Anastasia, VM., c. 304  <i>Mass at 10am</i> <i>W</i>	<b>26</b> St. Stephen, Proto-martyr, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	<b>27</b> St. John, Evangelist & Apostle, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	<b>28</b> Holy Innocents, Mm, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	<b>29</b> of the Octave of the Nativity	<b>30</b> of the Octave of the Nativity	<b>31</b> St. Sylvester, PC, 335; of the Octave of the Nativity  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>

Confessions may be made following Vespers, during the Psalms at Matins, and by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy.